GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
ENVIRONMENT, FORESTS AND CLIMATE CHANGE
LOK SABHA

STARRED QUESTION NO:332
ANSWERED ON:22.12.2015
Poaching of Star Tortoise
Gandhi Shri Feroze Varun;Raju Shri Gokaraju Ganga

Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT, FORESTS AND CLIMATE CHANGE be pleased to state:

(a) the number of different species of tortoise found in the country;
(b) whether the survival of the Indian star tortoise is under threat on account of a number of factors including legal loopholes thereby facilitating poaching of the said species;
(c) if so, the details thereof and the reasons therefor and the reaction of the Government thereto;
(d) whether a study report published by World Animal Protection has expressed legitimate concern about poachers having found a legal loophole in facilitating illegal poaching; and
(e) if so, the details thereof along with the measures taken by the Government to save the tortoises from extinction and plug the legal loopholes?

Answer

MINISTER OF STATE (INDEPENDENT CHARGE) FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE

(SHRI PRAKASH JAVADEKAR)

(a), (b), (c),(d) and (e) A statement is laid on the Table of the House

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STATEMENT REFERRED TO IN REPLY TO PARTS (a), (b), (c), (d) AND (e) OF THE LOK SABHA STARRED QUESTION NO.* 332 REGARDING "POACHING OF STAR TORTOISE" BY DR. GOKARAJU GANGA RAJU AND SHRI. FEROZE VARUN GANDHI FOR REPLY ON 22.12.2015:

(a) There are 33 species of turtles, tortoises and terrapins in the country. This includes four species of tortoises, 24 species of fresh water turtles/terrapins, and five species of marine turtles.

(b)and (c) Poaching and illegal trade of Indian Star Tortoise can not be ruled out. However, such poaching and illegal trade can not be attributed to legal loopholes. The most important threat for India's tortoises including the Indian Star Tortoise is the clandestine trade that exist significantly in different parts of the country and across the border to South East Asian countries. In order to protect these species, Government of India has listed all tortoises of family-Testudinidae and Tryonychidae, in Schedule-I and IV of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 protecting them from hunting. Star Tortoises comes in this category. Hunting of all the species listed in the schedules of the Act is an offence.
(d) and (e) The report published by the World Animal Protection has clearly mentioned that the government of India's Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 prohibits both trade and private ownership of Indian Sea Tortoises. However, legal domestic trade in other Asian countries appears to be undermining India's efforts to protect this species. Therefore, the study recommends more stringent government machinery for protection of the species. The important steps taken by the Government to protect these species include:

(i) The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has established the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau for the purpose of Collection, collation and dissemination of intelligence on wildlife crime to various agencies for apprehension of criminals.
(ii) The important steps taken by the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau to combat illegal wildlife trade include:
(a) Coordinating inter-agency enforcement efforts to combat illegal wildlife trade.
(b) Issuing 'Alerts' regarding illegal trade in wildlife and its parts and products, including those in turtles and tortoises, to the State and Central Police and other enforcement agencies like Border Security Force, Coast Guard, CISF, Customs, ITBP, SSB etc. These

'Alerts' also include identification descriptions, photographs, legal protection, modus operandi of hunting and trade, illegal trade routes and destination, etc. so as to enable enforcement agencies to control illegal trade in such species.

(c) Undertaking joint operations with state enforcement agencies to apprehend criminals involved in illegal activities.
(d) Developing an online wildlife crime management system for uploading the wildlife crime data through its web portal.
(e) Collating criminal profiles of 723 wildlife criminals involved in the illegal activities for the information of field enforcement agencies.
(iii) Several zoological parks in the country have been breeding some of these species in the captivity. Five priority chelonian areas in India have been identified: The Chambal River and Upper Ganges River System (central India); the Terai Region (northern India); Assam (north-eastern India); the Sunderbans of West Bengal and the State of Orissa (eastern India); and the Western Ghats and the states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh (southern India).

(iv) Protected Areas, viz., National Parks, Sanctuaries, Conservation Reserves and covering important wildlife habitats have been created all over the country under the provisions of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 to conserve wild animals and their habitats

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